

THE PLAIN DEALER

THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Could the U.S. have done even better?



A sign outside of the Kids Quarters playground at the Brecksville Recreation Center on March 31 explains the area is closed. Dramatic social distancing measures have given Ohio a better outlook than early projections showed. Marvin Fong, The Plain Dealer

Early, aggressive social distancing dramatically changed Ohio’s coronavirus outlook

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Ohio’s response to the coronavirus pandemic has garnered national attention, with experts crediting state officials for taking aggressive action to mitigate its spread. Dramatic social distancing measures like a statewide stay-at-home order have altered the outlook in Ohio, which could peak near 1,600 new COVID-19 cases per day this month. Earlier projections estimated the state could have seen a peak of 10,000 new cases per day. Infectious disease experts have known for centuries that social-distancing measures are the “gold standard” for mitigating the spread of viruses. They’ve been used to combat everything from the “Black Death” bubonic plague to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. Ohio’s improved outlook is just the latest example of distancing’s efficacy. Aggressive social-distancing measures do have their drawbacks. Ohio’s order to close non-essential businesses has resulted in more than 696,000 people applying for

unemployment benefits in the last three weeks. The economic damage has some calling for a quick “return to normal,” even as public health experts caution that easing social-distancing measures too soon could result in a spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths. **IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?** If social distancing is the “gold standard” for mitigating the spread of a virus, is it possible there’s a “platinum standard” that could keep us safe while limiting the economic damage? Experts say that it’s possible a massive increase in testing for COVID-19 could help us quickly identify and isolate cases. The rapid production of masks and other gear could also provide more protection. But even those approaches have drawbacks and are not feasible once the virus is widespread. **SEE OHIO’S OUTLOOK, A5**

CUYAHOGA COUNTY JAIL

Latest inmate to die was left unsupervised

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A former Ohio National Guardsman who committed suicide while lodged in the Cuyahoga County Jail last May was left unchecked for two-and-a-half hours before he was found dead, despite a jail officer marking in official logs that he checked inmates as required, according to documents released on Monday. Officer Barrington Brown marked in official jail logs that he checked on 36-year-old Nicholas Colbert every 15 minutes where he was housed in a special area of the jail with veterans and other inmates. But surveillance video revealed Brown never made those checks, according to Cuyahoga County Sheriff investigation into Colbert’s death. Records show Colbert ate lunch just before noon — the last time anyone saw him alive. About 2:30 p.m. an inmate found Colbert dead in his cell. An inmate could not immediately find Brown in the housing area and had to track

the officer down, records say. Brown retired 20 days after Colbert’s death. “It has been documented through watching surveillance video of the (Veteran’s Pod) and inmate interviews that C/O Brown routinely leaves the pod; even at times when the inmates are not locked in their cells,” Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Detective Tom Roberts wrote. Colbert’s death was the latest of nine inmates deaths at the jail within an 11-month span of June 2018, triggering investigations by the U.S. Marshals, FBI and Ohio Attorney General. Five out of nine deaths were suicides. Little is known about the early deaths, because jail officials conducted insufficient death investigations, according to a November 2018 U.S. Marshals Service report. **SEE JAIL, A10**



National Guard veteran Nicholas Colbert, 36, was found dead in his cell May 10 inside the Cuyahoga County Jail. Submitted by family

He was not put on suicide watch at the jail and received no medical treatment for the short time he was jailed.

School home

History's full of famous faces.

Today's assignment: Maya Angelou. Albert Einstein. William Shakespeare. History is full of famous faces. How many can you recognize? Page B3

OHIO ELECTIONS

Supreme Court rules on voting access ballot measure

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The Ohio Supreme Court, in a 6-1 ruling on Tuesday, ordered state officials to certify a voting access measure as a single ballot issue, overturning a previous decision backed by Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose that split it into four parts. In a written opinion, justices said the campaign behind the measure, Ohioans for Secure and Fair Elections, “has a clear legal right to certification of the proposed amendment” as a single issue, and that the Ohio Ballot Board “has a clear legal duty to make that certification.” They ordered the ballot board to meet within seven days to do so. Four Republican justices — Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor and Justices Pat DeWine, Judith French and Sharon Kennedy — joined two Democrats, Justices Michael Donnelly and Melody Stewart, in overturning the Ballot Board decision. Justice Pat Fischer, a Republican, dissented. Once the Ballot Board certifies the measure, Ohioans for Secure and Fair Elections could theoretically begin circulating petitions needed to get on the ballot. They had been aiming for the November election, a process that would require them to collect valid signatures from 442,958 registered voters from 44 of Ohio’s 88 counties. But the coronavirus pandemic presents major challenges for circulating petitions, since COVID-19 is spread through close personal contact. **SEE VOTING ACCESS, A14**

COVID-19 UPDATE

Service industries in dire situation

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Representatives from Ohio’s restaurants, hotels and salons, speaking with state lawmakers on Tuesday, painted a dire picture of the effect of the coronavirus crisis on their industries. Ohio’s 23,000-plus restaurants are only allowed to offer carryout and delivery service, under an order from the state Department of Health. As a result, 51 percent of restaurants in the state are closed completely, said John Barker, president and CEO of the Ohio Restaurant Association, to the Ohio House’s Economic Recovery Task Force. Compared to the same time last year, business is down 90 percent for fine-dining establishments, 75 percent for casual dining, 45 percent for fast-casual places like Chipotle, and 35 percent for fast-food restaurants, according to Barker. “The only portion of the (restaurant) industry that is showing numbers that are up is the delivery business,” Barker said. The sharp downturn in business has led 3 percent of Ohio restaurants (about 690 businesses) to already close permanently, Barker said, and an additional 11 percent (about 2,350 restaurants) expect that they will not reopen. It’s still unclear when restaurants will be allowed to reopen in Ohio. But even when that day comes, Barker said, many restaurant owners are predicting sales will be only 40-50 percent of what they were pre-pandemic. **SEE UPDATE, A5**